



John L. Salomone
Town Manager

TOWN OF NEWINGTON

131 CEDAR STREET
NEWINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06111

MAYOR JEFF WRIGHT

MINUTES

NEWINGTON TOWN COUNCIL PUBLIC HEARING

April 7, 2008

Mayor Wright called the meeting to order at 7:01 PM in the Council Chambers of the Newington Town Hall. Mayor Wright presented an overview of tentative changes to the 2008-2009 budget:

Changes to the Town Manager's Proposed Budget:

Item	Change
Increase to Human Services Score/Rope Program	\$10,000
Increase NCTV	\$5,000
Decrease Dues for CCM	(\$19,937)
Increase Town Hall Improvements and Repair Fund	\$731,500
Increase Road Resurfacing	\$310,000
Increased Fire Safety Equipment	\$15,000
Adjustments to Other Capital Programs	(\$892,500)
Reduce the Request Amount of the Board of Education	(\$200,000)

Key Points and Accomplishments

- The proposed tax increase is 2.86% - which is under the cap of 3.0%
- Increased Board of Education by \$2,380,870.00 over last year
 - Increased the Board of Education's capital improvements to \$1,315,000.00, which includes State grants for projects such as the field house (\$340,000 grant) and OCR improvements (\$60,000 grant). The \$1,315,000.00 represents a 139% increase over last year's capital improvements for the Board of Education.
 - Reduced the Board of Education's request by \$200,000 to delay the purchase of two school busses and one van pending a study of school transportation costs
 - Increased youth programs –Human Services Score and Rope programs
 - Provides Board of Education funding for two additional school social workers
- Public Safety
 - Hiring three additional police officers (one of which will be a youth officer) to bring the total number of officers to 51.
 - Institute a pay per call program for the Newington Volunteer Fire Department
 - Emphasis on road reconstruction and road resurfacing – 22 roads will be repaired or resurfaced in 2008-2009
- The 2008-2009 budget is a fiscally responsible budget which secures Newington's future.

Town Council's Tentative Budget 2008-2009 Overview

(Editor's Note: Actual figures rather than rounded were used in these minutes)

Item	Tentative \$	\$ Change	% Change
Total Appropriations	\$93,321,692	\$3,387,204	3.77%
General Government	\$28,134,112	\$853,366	3.13%
Board of Education	\$55,872,142	\$2,308,870	4.31%
Debt Service and CIP	\$6,412,738	\$112,738	1.79%
MDC	\$2,818,600	\$112,230	4.15%
Non-Tax Revenue	\$20,423,891	\$294,084	1.46%
Mill Rate	27.68	.77	2.86%

Total Appropriations

Item	2007-2008	2008-2009 Tentative	Change	%
Total Appropriations	\$89,934,000	\$93,321,000	\$3,387,000	3.77%
Mill Rate	26.91	27.68	.77	2.86%

Following the budget presentation, the Pledge of Allegiance was recited and roll call was taken.

Councilors Present:

Councilor Banach
Councilor Boni
Councilor Bottalico
Councilor Bowen
Councilor Cohen
Councilor Lenares
Councilor Nagel
Councilor Nasinnyk
Mayor Wright

Staff Present

John L. Salomone, Town Manager
Lori Verreault, Executive Assistant
Ann Harter, Finance Director
Lisa Rydecki, Deputy Finance Director

Mayor Wright invited members of the public to speak about the tentative 2008-2009 budget.

Mary Udice, 26 Dalewood Road: Mrs. Udice stated that her remarks are directed at Mayor Wright, Deputy Mayor Lenares and the Republican members of the Town Council and stated that the decision to slash \$200,000 from the Board of Education's budget and \$122,500 from the Parks and Recreation's CIP budget is not a wise choice. She noted that the tax increase came in at under the promised 3% tax cap and included an increase in funds to resurface roads. Mrs. Udice stated that she would prefer to live with potholes and to give the funds back to the Board of Education and the Board of Parks and Recreation. She stated that her two children have both been receiving a wonderful education in the Newington School system and noted that per-student spending has finally gone up over the past several years. She noted, however, that if the Council keeps slashing the budget per-student spending will go the wrong way again and the Town's chances of being nationally-recognized for its excellent schools will just be a pipe dream. Mrs. Udice stated that we are now in a terrible housing slump, but asked once the economy turns around whether people will want to move to our community if the Town does not want to spend enough money on education. She noted that property values will continue to drop as well. Mrs. Udice stated that she is employed by the Newington Board of Education as a Special Education Assistant which allows her to see the issues from both sides. She stated that she works with a dedicated, hard-working group of teachers who really care about the students of Newington. She stated that she has seen instances where there have not been enough books or materials to go around or where the materials have been very outdated. She requested that the Council care about the children as much as their families, the teachers and the Board of Education care by putting the \$200,000

back into their budget. Mrs. Udice stated that she is also a Commissioner on the Newington Board of Parks and Recreation and noted a strategic master plan which identifies all priority items, a copy of which is on file with the Town Council. She stated that each year the Board of Parks and Recreation's budget is cut and the facilities, pools, parks, etc. need to be updated. She noted that these areas are used by everyone in Town and asked the Council to immediately reinstate the money to the Board's budget. Mrs. Udice again asked the Council to do what is right for the children and reinstate the money into the budget.

Maureen Klett – 104 Harold Drive: Mrs. Klett noted a recent meeting in which the Town Council voted to remove \$20,000 from the budget, which represents the cost of joining the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities. Mrs. Klett stated that CCM is Connecticut's statewide association representing over 90% of the State's population or approximately 140 municipalities. She strongly urged the Council to reconsider this action. She stated that the CCM is currently addressing legislation for statutory prohibition against new unfunded and under funded mandates, which would be very helpful to Newington. Mrs. Klett stated that any Councilor, as a member of CCM, can request information including State and national trends and programs. She stated that the small cost of membership to the CCM will pay for itself many times over. She stated that according to the CCM's public policy report dated 1/17/08 education costs are on average responsible for 66.80% of a municipal budget and noted that in Newington the education costs (minus the CIP spending) is projected to be 66.59% of the total budget, slightly below the average. Mrs. Klett noted that the Council eliminated \$200,000 from the Board of Education's budget despite the pleas from the Democratic minority to cut the reduction to \$100,000 and stated that she sadly read how one Republican Town Council member thought a discussion on the merit of the Board's budget was "garbage". Mrs. Klett quoted from an editorial published in the Hartford Courant entitled *Hard Work on Crime*: "Another group, nearly 3,000 inmates, are serving sentences for the sale or possession of illegal drugs.... About 70 percent of inmates have no high school diploma or GED, and about 80 percent report substance abuse problems. Many come from chaotic homes." Mrs. Klett stated that as a past Board of Education member she is hopeful that the Council will consider restoring some of the funds back to the Board of Education's budget because when the Board is faced with cutting its budget the first thing to go is always the new positions, which in this case can be the new social workers. She stated that anyone who thinks that the cost of education is too high should consider what was stated in the Courant's editorial: "The nonprofit Alliance for Excellent Education estimates that Connecticut could save \$63 million in crime-related costs if the male high school graduation rate was increased by just 5 percent." Mrs. Klett stated that the Town will pay for education one way or the other. Mrs. Klett stated that she has provided the Town Manager with printouts of the CCM 2008 State legislative priorities and encouraged the Council to review the printouts as they would be helpful to the Town. Mrs. Klett also complimented the Clerk of the Town Council on the quality of the Council's meeting minutes.

Stanley Ostrowski, 200 John Street: Mr. Ostrowski stated that it is time to minimize the overall budget on everything. He stated that the economy is slowing down and people have less money to pay and just like with any business if the prices go up too high the company will push itself out of business and if Newington keeps raising and raising taxes there will be more people leaving Town. Mr. Ostrowski stated that if small families leave they may be replaced with families who have many children resulting in more increases in the budget. He stated that education spending should be kept in line because budget increases over the past forty years have always been about education. He stated that spending should be done to a minimum because it is getting difficult for people and will begin to affect small businesses and restaurants. He remarked that if these small businesses leave there will be even less income for the Town. Mr. Ostrowski stated that people cannot sustain increases year after year and again stated that the budget should be kept in line. He also spoke about road resurfacing and noted that his road was resurfaced two years ago and is cracking all over. He stated that maybe the roads are not being resurfaced correctly and requested that the Town look into the matter. Mr. Ostrowski also stated that education starts at home and if parents don't teach the children from the beginning no teacher will be able to help.

Gary Bolles, 28 Burdon Lane: Mr. Bolles read from an article published in the New Britain Herald entitled *Comptroller Watches Health Insurance Program From Municipalities*: "The State comptroller is launching a program to use the State's buying power to drive down health insurance costs for cities and towns. The plan calls for pooling municipal employees into one large risk group. Nancy Wyman says her office is asking interested local leaders to submit claims data and employee census data by April 10th. The coverage is scheduled to begin on July 1st. A private third party will administer the program. Cities and towns will be able to choose from several different benefit plans. Both the Connecticut Conference of Municipalities and various labor unions are supporting Wyman's initiative. They are hoping cities and towns can save tens of millions of dollars by spreading out the insurance risk." Mr. Bolles submitted copies of the article to the Town

Manager and stated that the Town might be able to save money using this initiative and therefore be able to give back the money cut from the Board of Education and Parks and Recreations budget in 2008-2009.

Don Woods, 82 Ivy Lane: Mr. Woods spoke about his concerns with the budget eliminations of the parks and playfield improvements and also about the resurfacing program. Mr. Woods stated that as a member of the Board of Parks and Recreation he is speaking on his own behalf and is not speaking directly for the Board. Mr. Woods listed some items covered by the parks and playfield improvements account:

- Used for a number of years to repair and enhance the park system equipment.
- The account also covers items beyond normal maintenance such as fencing, play equipment, bleachers, signs and State and insurance company mandated items such as a mandated \$5,000 yearly playground inspection.

Mr. Woods stated that the account was positioned to acquire the services of a landscape architect to redesign the parks to reflect current trends and uses and the rebuilding of areas as well as repairs. He stated that to have funding in this account eliminated will result in the loss of initiatives for bikeways, trail ways, a dog park, Young Farm, etc. which require funding beyond donations. He stated that it will lead to a deterioration of existing buildings and facilities. Mr. Woods listed items covered by the resurfacing account:

- Intended to pave or repave facilities such as pathways, play areas, tennis courts, parks and athletic areas
- Used to provide certified play molds for equipment play areas.

Mr. Woods stated safety standards have changed over the past few years and now the Town is required to maintain substantial mulch areas, replenished every two years at an approximate cost of \$3,000 per site; failure to do so could result in possible legal liability. Mr. Woods stated that while these areas do not typically fall under capital improvement they do need to be in place and there are no other funds available to Parks and Recreation to accomplish these maintenance items. He stated that with the recent downturn in the economy people are going to stay home more and it is reasonable to believe that the parks are going to be used more than ever this year. He stated that Town residents receive a tremendous amount of benefit and enjoyment for the few thousands of dollars spent on the parks. He asked the Council to reconsider the elimination of the funds in their entirety and to see it fit to restore a good portion of the eliminated funds. Mr. Woods stated that the Council is asking the Board to run on empty.

ADJOURNMENT

Councilor Boni moved to close the Public Hearing at 7:29pm. Motion seconded by Deputy Mayor Lenares.

Motion passed 9-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mrs. Jaime Trevethan
Clerk of the Council